









A  
LECTURE INTRODUCTORY  
TO THE  
COURSE OF OBSTETRICS

IN  
JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE

OF PHILADELPHIA,

DELIVERED NOVEMBER 5, 1842.

BY C. D. MEIGS, M.D.

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PUBLISHED BY THE CLASS.  
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## CORRESPONDENCE.

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*Philadelphia, Nov. 8th, 1842.*

DEAR SIR,—At a meeting of the Class of Jefferson Medical College, held on Monday, the 7th instant, Thomas K. Price, of Virginia, in the chair, we were appointed a committee to wait on you to obtain a copy of your truly eloquent Introductory Lecture, to the present Class, for publication. We beg, therefore, that you will transmit to us a copy for that purpose. Your compliance with this request will be regarded with the liveliest gratitude both by the Committee and the Class.

Very respectfully,

We remain your friends,

THOMAS K. PRICE, of Va.  
J. D. ROBISON, Ohio.  
LEWIS PAULLIN, Florida.  
CHARLES A. PHELPS, Mass.  
T. DUPUY MONTEGRIER, France.  
E. C. CHEW, N. J.  
WILLIAM W. WATTS, N. C.  
F. L. PARHAM, S. C.  
JAMES T. GEE, Ala.  
J. F. PHILEAS PROULX, L. C.  
J. CURTIS, Conn.  
J. B. MASSER, Penn.  
A. MCFARLAND, N. H.  
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WILLIAM T. CORE, Va.  
JOSEPH H. DAY, Ky.  
A. A. J. RIDDLE, Ga.  
R. N. WRIGHT, Md.  
M. HOWARD, Cuba.  
AARON YOUNG, Jr., Me.  
JNO. J. BACON, N. Y.  
J. H. PAYNE, Miss.  
GEO. W. EWELL, Tenn.  
J. VON BRITTON, St. Thomas.  
J. C. NEVES, Montevideo.

To Professor C. D. Meigs.



*Philadelphia, Nov. 11th, 1842.*

GENTLEMEN,—Although my Introductory Lecture was prepared without any expectation that it should be submitted to the public eye through the press, I am sensible that I ought not to withhold it after the expressions of approbation which you have been so good as to convey to me on the part of the class. I therefore send it to you with the assurance of the profound gratitude which I feel for the kindness and goodness so often manifested by the gentlemen whom I am appointed to instruct, in this Institution.

Accept, gentlemen, for yourselves, the assurance of the great regard with which I have the honour to be

Your obedient and faithful servant,

CHARLES D. MEIGS.

*To Thomas K. Price, &c. &c., Committee.*



## INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

GENTLEMEN, before I proceed to address you upon the subjects which form the topic of this introductory lecture, I feel that I ought to take care to set myself right upon one matter, in the eyes of this whole audience. I have feared that some of the remarks contained in my discourse, might seem too special in their mode of invoking attention to obstetric studies—and to those especially of *this* College: I feared that such a construction might be put on them by the gentlemen who, though belonging to the other Medical Classes in Philadelphia, have yet done me the grace and honour to be present this evening, and for which I tender them my hearty and most sincere thanks. But I feared not any such impression on the part of those who have already signified to me their intention to become members of my class; since I hoped that they would see and feel the propriety there is, and the necessity, indeed, under our existing relation as teacher and pupils, of my invoking, by every valid argument, and by all the powers of suasion, their full co-operation in the proposed investigations. With this short preface, gentlemen, I now proceed to say that—

I purpose to offer you to-day some thoughts upon the profession of a practitioner of midwifery, with reflections upon the nature of his duties, and the extent of his responsibility to the public and to his brethren.

I select this topic for an introduction to my course of lectures, because I wish, if possible, to impress upon your minds a just sense of the importance of the undertaking in which you are now engaged, and so endeavour to secure a proper share of your attention and regard to that branch of medicine which I am here appointed to teach: and I doubt not of success in that design, if I can make you duly sensi-



ble of the gravity of the engagements you are now entering upon, and of the frequent appeals to be made to you at a future day, for the exercise of all the skill and all the knowledge that you shall be able to acquire, by the greatest diligence, not in these walls alone, but in the entire duration of your medical career. I also wish you to look before you, and scan a little that long pathway, which, to many of your young imaginations, appears strewn with flowers, and garnished with pleasant retreats and refreshing shades, in which to repose yourselves when overdone by the fatigues and incidents of the journey. You probably view it as leading through scenes enriched with every variety of attractive landscape, a path of pleasantness and all its ways peace. I wish, gentlemen, that the experience I have had these many years past, of the nature and requisitions of this branch of medical and surgical practice, could leave me the pleasant liberty of cheering you on in these bright anticipations! I should like to point to certain, speedy, and brilliant success, as the reward of every student within the sound of my voice. Would that I could point out to him, competency, full employment, fortune, public respect, and even *fame*, as the high prizes held out to him to day, and easy to be won. But, alas! that pathway is long; it is an arduous thing to walk through it: there are a thousand obstacles, and many dangers that beset the traveller there, and so uncertain and devious is the way, that many, who enter upon it with buoyant hearts, and minds fired with ambition, begin to lose all hope before they are gone far, or become disgusted with the difficulties and weariness of the way, and return utterly discomfited, and even ruined, in their attempt to go through with it.

Now, methinks I might hear some one of you say, this is a very discouraging beginning. This is not the way to excite our enthusiasm. This, surely is not the way to stimulate us, and make us emulate the great names that we have read of in medical history. Well, gentlemen, I cannot help that conclusion. I am standing here to tell you the truth, and have

*wreak!*



no more right to make a false report of the profession than I have to mislead you as to the doctrine or practice of my art, in an arm presentation, a puerperal convulsion, or a puerperitis of the womb.

I do not know, I do not even believe that it lies within the compass of my ability, or that of any other man, to impart to you an accurate view of the length and breadth of the matter which now engages our thoughts. It is a perfect truth, that every man must get his *own* experience. The views of the aged, who have passed through the stirring scenes of life, derive a soberer cast, perhaps, from the calming influence of years, and the exhaustion of that exuberant vivacity and strength of imagination that they once possessed—and let such a man tell the youth whatsoever sober truth about life and its troubles, he listens not—he seeks wealth or fame, or honour, and thinks, with young Harry Hotspur, “by Heaven it were an easy leap, to pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon, or plunge into the bottom of the sea, and drag up drowned honour by the locks.” He cannot believe, because he cannot understand the disappointments that are before him. At all events he fears nothing, and sets forth upon his voyage of discovery. Like a young sailor, he dreams of summer seas, and gentle gales, with softly rocking billows; he sees in fancy’s sketch, the beautiful coasts, and fair cities and towns to which he shall sail,—of fortune made by bold adventure, health throughout a long life, retirement to the farm, and a green old age. The ship, too, is to him the most beautiful creation of human skill, and all is fair and bright as he steps upon her shining deck, looks upwards along the tapering masts, or views her snowy wings. To him there is no sunken rock in the sea, no lee-shore of the ocean, no pirates there, nor tempest that shall scatter all her spices” on the stream, and strew the roaring waters with her silks, casting his body, half exanimate, shivering and torn, on the strand, which he left so full of fond anticipations, and such undoubted confidence. The same is true of the merchant, the lawyer, the divine, the physician. “How is it, Mecænus, that no hu-

*good*



man being is contented with his own lot," was the question that Flaccus asked almost nineteen hundred years ago, and the proposition is as true now as it was then—and ever has been.

Now, gentlemen, I believe men fail in their plans of life, because they either have formed no good ones, or because they adopt such as are wholly impracticable. In making them out, they sometimes do not impartially and candidly inquire into their real advantages, and the prospects they hold forth. Many men are forced upon plans they do not approve of, and which they feel themselves unfit to execute: their friends mislead them by their counsel, or compel them by their authority, to take up with certain modes of employment totally foreign to their inclinations and capacities. It is a great misfortune, in my opinion, for an individual to be early placed in a position which he is sooner or later compelled to abandon.

Seeing that these bodies of ours must be fed, clothed and lodged while we are in this present world; and that other and pressing wants, beyond those of prime necessity, have been engendered in the hot-bed of human civilization; wants almost as exigent in their appeals to us as our hunger and our thirst; every wise man—every man who reflects that three score and ten come ever too soon, and that the working-day is over long before they do come, every such man will begin life with the design so to provide for the wants and luxuries and indulgences of life, as to put himself beyond the necessity for labour, or the risk of want or dependence, at a period when the bodily energy and intellectual vigour required in human pursuits, are gone from him for ever;—he will endeavour to lay up a provision against the wants and dangers of old age.

To a young man, for example, just turned out into the world to take care of himself, I should suppose the most obvious sentiment would be that of acquiring subsistence now, and securing it for the future. But if he possess in early life, any portion of that gravity, and that spirit of reflection, which



are the best evidences of a well-balanced and reflecting mind, he will not enter upon pursuits wholly foreign to his tastes and talents. If he does so, habit, the drill of custom, necessity, may drive him on, and on; but he will never be happy, never be contented—he will never get ahead: how could he be satisfied or happy who is out of his proper sphere?—he ought to have been bred a politician, or an astronomer; he was never born to be a physician; he was qualified for the steady employment of agriculture;—or the monotonous hum of the mill might have filled up the whole gamut of his soul; or his rapacious and money-loving heart could have found fulness, and fatness, and consolation, in the shop, or behind the counter. Yes, gentlemen, there are thousands of our fellow-creatures in civilised society who have lost their places there, and never will find them again: they have wooed fortune at the shrine of a stranger divinity. All such persons are of the “*nemo quam sibi sortem*” class, *seu ratio dederit seu fors objecerit*. They are not, and will not be happy people, nor fortunate.

The question with you is, is it a reputable pursuit—this of medicine? are you by temper, health, disposition, well fitted to engage in the pursuit of a practitioner of midwifery, and does that profession hold forth to you, inducements to the diligent study of it?

In the first place, it certainly is a reputable calling. It is reputable, not only from its intrinsic usefulness and necessity, as a branch of industrial action required by the wants of society, in every part of the world; but it is so by the moral attributes and the intellectual attainments required of those who are engaged in it. It is also reputable by the great character and renown of many learned and virtuous men who have given dignity to it by their lives and actions, by their conduct and conversation.

I said, just now, that our branch has an “intrinsic usefulness!” It is one of the wants of the race,—that of an amount of knowledge sufficient to conduct the victims of pain, disease, or terror, in safety through the severe trials of



the primal curse, "in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children." When, in former ages, the practice of the art was left in the hands of females only, and they, generally, the most ignorant and uneducated of their kind, the medical men were but little stimulated, or interested, to make investigations into the more recondite practices of the obstetric study.

But, as the art and study of midwifery was incapable of attracting the regards of the powerful minds, whose vast energies were directed upon the other medical sciences, the care of women, and the investigation, indeed, of female diseases, was left, where they found it, in deep obscurity, overlooked and disregarded. Hence, all the vile and most barbarous practices which you will find recommended in the early writers. Examine Spach's collection under the title "Gynæciorum," and you will be amazed at the grossness and stupidity of the rules which were observed in early times; and if you compare them with the clean, neat, elegant and respectful, as well as scientific processes, and the profound views of the biological laws which are concerned in the cases now, you will be ready to lift up your voices in congratulation, on account of the great advantages derived to our mothers and wives and daughters, from the beneficent exercise of this important art. Why this change—this great improvement—if not that, in civilized nations, the care of women in pregnancy, in labour, and in the puerperal state, is committed mostly to members of the medical profession by whom the boundaries of the science have been removed further and further, and the sum of the knowledge obtained upon midwifery and its allied topics has so increased, that the practice of it has become, on that very account, a highly honourable and reputable pursuit?

As for those who have lent it the grace of their names, and reflected, through them and it, honour on their country, what needs it that I should do more than mention the distinguished gentlemen who have, within a short time, been taken out from the midst of us. Such are the names of Dr. James, and of Wm. P. Dewees, that of Dr. Bard, that of Hosack, of



New York, and a large list that I might cite from our own country, all in evidence of the great respectability of the pursuits of an accoucheur.

In foreign countries, we have a Mauriceau, *præclarum et venerabile nomen*; the Sieur de la Motte; the ardent and accomplished Levret; the indefatigable William Smellie; William Hunter, Denman, Jean Louis Baudelocque, &c. *Madam Boivin* &c., all of which are fit to excite in our hearts a spirit of emulation, to equal them in excellence and power. I mean excellence in skill, learning, charitableness, industry: power to dispense the blessings of knowledge far and wide in every rank of society. Such men are not mere practitioners of midwifery! Emulate them; they are savans and philosophers, who have honoured their country and their calling by elevating the standard of knowledge. They are philosophers more beneficent than a thousand Voltaires, more ingenious than ten thousand Rousseaus; and as writers, in real useful practical knowledge, go far beyond the Byrons, the Scotts, and the Bozzes, who have had the incense of a world's applause, and have been rewarded for their poetical imaginings far beyond their deserts, if those deserts should be compared with those of our illustrious exemplars. These men have conferred lasting and great benefits upon the human family by their writings—benefits that will be felt for ages to come. You are then in no danger as regards the respectability of your profession. If you aim to accomplish as much as these celebrated men have effected, and succeed in your design, you will be lifted up as high in the public esteem as if you were clothed in the ermine of the courts, or directing the fleets or armies of the Republic. Is General Scott more known than Dr. Chapman? Is not the name of Rush, as far heard as that of Greene? Dr. Physick was as much an American celebrity as Decatur, or Perry, or M'Donough, or Bainbridge. *yes*

Wits and light minded people have amused themselves in laughing at the profession. In doing so they have missed their aim. Professional men, as remarked by Dr. Gregory,



may very well furnish materials for the ridicule of the poet, or the dramatist or the caricaturist, when by the assumption of an importance, to which they personally can lay no claim, they fairly expose themselves as butts for the shaft to fly at. But the science of medicine! one might as well ridicule religion, or mathematics, or geology.

*his of medicine* It is by some persons, who reflect but little before they form their opinions, deemed one of the easiest and lightest studies in medicine—that of midwifery. But, gentlemen, let me beg you to pause before you suffer yourselves to think with these people. No; you have a very laborious task, if you should resolve to discharge your whole duty in studying this branch of medicine. Midwifery has become a science as well as an art. It comprises within its limits a vast amount of anatomical and physiological acquisitions, an immense range of therapeutical applications, much of what might be called pure surgery, and is, in fact, a superstructure on the general base of the other medical sciences. It demands all that the general practitioner ever attains to, and beyond that, much that is peculiar and appropriate to its own sphere. Its theories on reproduction, and its deep researches into the arcana of the operations disclosed only by the microscope, or to the eye of reason, are among the most curious and important that can engage the attention of the philosopher. And these researches are not limited in their results to the gratification of a mere idle curiosity, but they are instituted for, and they lead to, the detection of the nature and principles of those affections, and motions, and diseases, which we are bound to comprehend, in order that we may the better be enabled to exercise upon them the high ministry of our art—the art of curing diseases.

Does it require a considerable study to qualify a man to feel confident and safe when he enters upon the business of a practitioner of midwifery? I have before said, that it demands of him a full and perfect knowledge of the practice of physic, since he cannot separate himself from the obligation to practise physic constantly, while keeping charge of his



obstetric patients, who not only need the most prudent, and sometimes the most prompt counsel, but must have it at his hands. The study of the practice, therefore, is a part of the education of an accoucheur. What is that study of the practice? Who shall set bounds to it? Why, gentlemen, you cannot even make out a correct bibliography of the Medical Sciences. Dr. J. B. Montfalcon, in his *Precis de Bibliographie Medicale*, says that the erudition of all the nations might in vain attempt to make out a correct Medical Bibliography; and that the three French Faculties alone, at Paris, have produced more than 10,000 works within thirty years past; and he estimates the whole number at half a million. Haller, he says, besides his great works, published eleven or twelve thousand analyses or prefaces, the very nomenclature of which would be impossible at the present day. See, then, if you should endeavour to make yourselves acquainted with medical literature, in order to discover whether any and what improvements have been effected by the lapse of time, how you would have to seek that knowledge in a vast number of works, the greater part of whose doctrines are now looked upon by many as obsolete; but which to know, would be a high privilege and honour to any physician.

*What does this prove that the author has read the book in your*

As for the bibliography of our own particular branch, it is very greatly increased within a few years past. In fact, publication succeeds publication so rapidly, that it is difficult to keep pace with a press so prolific as to fatigue and almost satiate with its excessive productiveness. The obstetric bibliography was oppressive so far back as the days of Mercklin and Linden; and M. Sue, in his curious volumes, exhibits to us a picture of the labours of those writers who, previous to his publication in 1767, had loaded the shelves with essays and tractates, and systems without end. Those old works ought not to be forgotten. Alas! for us,—we live in a degenerate age, when nothing serves us but some newly vamped up exposé of doctrines, which were once refined in the furnace of those intellectual fires, which, if they gave out some dross from their cupels, yet also showed them glowing with



much fine gold. I like the enthusiasm of Alex. Massarias, who, having read the works of Hippocrates sixty times, said, iterum vellem legere. And I can almost applaud the old Arabian, who said, se malle cum Galeno errare, quam cum omnibus aliis, bene sentire.

*non arabic*

While you are engaged here, in the school of Jefferson College, it will be my duty to indicate, to the best of my ability, all the sources of that information which you have taken the pains to seek; while I am doing so, all that is worthy to be called demonstrations, will have in your case the novelty of original discovery. For example; if I can make to you a good demonstration of the foetal circulation, from the specimen, it will have all the freshness of a new discovery as far as concerns those of you who see it for the first time, though hundreds of persons have made the same demonstration before. There are books which you ought to read during the winter as aids to your memory in the intervals between my lectures. It cannot be expected that you should find time, with such pressing avocations as yours, to give your days and nights to the poring over all the authors who have written upon this branch; but when you go forth to establish yourselves in those permanent homes where you shall acquire the confidence of a whole community—there and then will be the time to improve the mind by the study of various authors, who, from age to age, in a long succession of centuries, having gathered up the fragments of knowledge that have been collected out of the whole multitudinous experience of centuries, this day tender them to us, so that, now at last, when fully arranged and classified, we find ourselves in the possession of an enormous wealth of science, which it has taken all those ages and toils to accumulate out of every source, whether of reason or accident. In fact, science may be compared to the miraculous feast on the shores of Gennesareth, which consisted of five small loaves and two little fishes; and after having fed five thousand men, left more than twelve baskets full.



These books are the garners of knowledge; you must winnow the wheat from the chaff, and you shall find that many of them are not like three grains of wheat hidden in two bushels of chaff, which you may search for all day before you shall find them, and then find they are worth nothing; they are full of good things. I should like to see the gentleman in this or any other country, who gives better counsels than Smellie gave; profounder elucidations than Levret; or illustrations more magnificent than the Anatomia Uteri Humani of Wm. Hunter. *then why are the similar?*

The works of Hippocrates contain things worth reading; so do those of Galen, those of Celsus, Paul of Egina, Fernel, Mauriceau's work on Midwifery, published in 1668: the pleasing histories of his experience by the Sieur Gillaume Marquest de La Motte, who practised at Valognes, in La Manche, and gave its results to the world in 1715, M. Levret's volume in 1766, those of his great contemporary Wm. Smellie, William Hunter's Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus, Jean Louis Baudelocque's treatise, Gardien's copious disquisitions; the late admirable results of the attention to our subject of one of the finest heads in Europe, I mean that of M. Velpeau, whose system of midwifery, and his treatise on Ovology or Embryology are worthy of his fame. The philosophical disquisitions, and the detailed cases, looking like portraits, by Mad. La Chapelle; Moreau, Chailly, Cazeau, Ollivier, Brierre de Boismont, Montgomery, Collins, Churchill, Rigby, Wagner and Barry. I might present you a long catalogue. All these writers are worthy of your regard. There is not one of them from whom you could not reap a harvest of information, which it will be your pride, your glory, and more, your happiness, to apply for the redemption of the lives that, but for such ministry, were already sacrificed.

What is the science, and what the practice of midwifery, that it should be the last on the long file of medical and chirurgical attainments? Whom doth it concern? What! is it of little import to one half of the race, that their peculiar



Good nature should be investigated with peculiar care? Is it a small matter to mitigate the pains and agonies of the puerperal state? Is it a small matter to deal with the most deadly of epidemics—and to deal skilfully and successfully—to baffle the activity of the most subtle poisons, to keep alive the hearth-fire, and to uphold the family altar, which, but for us, is abandoned and broken down, leaving only the monuments of its beauty and holiness in hearts that are broken, and tears that flow unceasingly?

Look at the progress daily made in our science—the beneficial adaptation of rules of practice, to well elucidated and established principles, in order to behold the good fruits which on every hand, spring from the culture of the tree of science.

Yes, gentlemen, your profession is a good one: it is even ennobled, in view of the signal benefits it confers upon society. Here is encouragement for you—here are incitements to toil, and to victory—Will you run the career!!

I have a word to say to such of the gentlemen as have already formed the design to devote themselves to pure surgery—to the general practice, or to some medical speciality. I ask then, if under these views, they will be excusable in the total neglect of the obstetric study? Do they expect to avoid all responsibility of an obstetric kind? Will they find themselves in a position always to refuse their aid to some suffering creature, who, pressed by a sudden and dire necessity, appeals to them from the brink of the grave for rescue, for safety? Yes! they have one very powerful plea—it is that of ignorance! ignorance of what? Ignorance of one of the most important portions of medical knowledge—ignorance of what is held in every medical college a prerequisite to the admission for examination, and a certain *proficiency* in which is a sine qua non to the attainment of the academic laurel. Now, in a community which reads newspapers from the cradle to the grave, where every body reads books, and every body thinks, every body knows what he has a right to expect from a medical man, and of course



knows that he who is wholly ignorant of the theory and practice of midwifery, is an imperfectly educated physician. Yes, this will be his excuse, his lame apology; so lame indeed, that he will halt with it for the rest of his days. Let any man refuse to practice midwifery, as a regular part of his business, with all my heart, I congratulate him on the resolution,—but let no man offer the shameless apology that he knows nothing on the subject. As well might a school boy present himself at some examination, a candidate for the academic prizes, and avow that he had learned all but his alphabet.

Should you enter upon this study, or this practice, with a view to reap the pecuniary rewards of labour bestowed upon it, or induced by other considerations, I assure you from painful experience that you have an arduous task to fulfil. The whole of the business of medical men is of a nature fit to excite the commiseration of persons employed in other pursuits, less exigent in their demands. Here is one discomfort, for example: throughout all Christendom men enjoy the blessed repose of the Sabbath day, in which the whirling engine even rests from its weary rotation: the loom ceases its week-long click, and the shuttle no more hurries athwart the decreasing woof. The hum of the spinning wheel is no more heard. The patient ox and the fiery steed enjoy the repose which the ordinances of our religion have so beneficently granted to man himself, to his man-servant, to his maid servant, to his ox and to his ass—and to every thing that is his. Peace, be still. Such is the ordinance of religion, and such the privilege of men. We are the exceptions. We, however, infringe no Divine law, when the wants and dangers and sufferings of our fellow men call us forth of the repose which is our right; and our industry can know no intervals; we may truly say that we have no seventh portion of time, to be given up wholly to contemplation—to a retrospection of our past lives—and to the formation of good resolutions



for the future. A physician, in full employment, may truly say, "and Sunday shines no sabbath day for me."

The pangs of disease, and the approaches of death know no distinction of days, and they who require our care will, in general, look upon us as soldiers on post; always on the alert, always ready, always cheerful, always confident in our mental discipline. No, gentlemen, there is no repose for the physician. The merchant may close his counting house at five o'clock, and the best part of the day is his own, for books, for conversation, and for the most agreeable independence of the calls of business. The lawyer knows when the courts meet. The long winters of the farmer, are long seasons of repose. But the medical man!—why he cannot even rear his own children; there is even danger that he may lose their confidence and love, from the impossibility of his giving them that share of his society and conversation, to which they might assert a natural and indefeasible claim!!

Can he transfer his business to a clerk, or can he defer until to-morrow, the diagnosis and the prescriptions for a pleurisy, or a remittent, that may be destroying to-day? No! the practice requires his personal devotion, all his life long—and is, perhaps, not the less clamorous in seasons when he has the least to do. He is a public servant, and when he is known as such in the community, the members of that community expect, and have a right to expect, that he will be ready to assist them.

If so constant, and yet so desultory, and various be the demands upon our time, as physicians—what are the bonds which he assumes who enters largely into the duties of an accoucheur. Alas—is there in the whole round of the treadmill of human affairs, a more difficult track? I met a gentleman the other day; he was once extensively engaged in obstetric business here. I saw that he looked sick and weary. "I am done with the practice," said he, "I have lost my health at it, and I have given it up. I will never engage in it again." "Tell me," said I, "did you not find it an agitating pursuit?" "Agitating," said he, "I have a



disease of the heart—and expect to die suddenly, perhaps soon. An agitating pursuit! I'll tell you what—there is no earthly consideration that could lead me to go through it again, as I have once. Let me see, no! no! short of my eternal salvation, I deem no compensation equal to its demands."

A practitioner of midwifery, gentlemen, is more hampered than any other member of the profession. He must be at hand. His patients notify him before hand. They make engagements with him. In fact, he is retained for the occasion, and, though the fee is not given in hand, like the retainer fee of the advocate, he is bound by a contract, and his word should be as good as his bond, to be present and assisting, at a certain place and time. Suppose he prefers the dinner table, or the theatre. What says the poor woman in labour? Did you ever witness the appearance of a woman under a *throe* of her labour!!!

You are busy, or you are idle, no matter which, but you are not at your post, and the child is born while you finish the last glass of wine, or burn out the stump of the cigar—and it is born dead—because no one was present to save it alive, by a wave of the hand, thus—or to prevent some ignorant bystander from destroying it by a gesture in the opposite and wrong direction.

Do you wish to show the town to some old and early friend, who has come to recall the pleasant memory of school-boy days? No! you can't go with him. You are engaged and should you be off post what might be the consequence at Mr. A., Mr. B., or Mr. C.'s.

One of the greatest and most painful trials of the accoucheur is dependant on his liability to long detention near the sick. No man can be expected by the public to receive the application of only a single patient at a time. Suppose his list has fifty or seventy-five sick upon it—what is he to do in the case where he is detained by some tempestuous or dreadful labour, for twenty-four, nay, for forty-eight hours, and cannot tear himself away from her whose fate seems



linked for the time, with his presence and care. Can he break, by abandoning them in their deep distress, hearts that are already near to bursting? Will he be so cruel as to leave, a prey to doubt, to terror, and even to greater danger, the tender female who has committed into his hands the great concern of that painful conflict? Yet his own heart throbs—yes, violently, and the warm blood rushes to his heart as he frequently thinks of the interests that are at stake elsewhere, and of the unjust and cruel construction to be put upon his compulsory and most unwilling neglect. You must prepare yourselves, by a self-sacrificing spirit to the encountering of many privations, and the foregoing of many indulgencies that other men allow themselves in freely.

How painful are the responsibilities of the art. Here take this case. Suppose one of you young gentlemen should graduate here next spring, and settle in some town where you are to be the sole physician. A lady informs you that she is seized with symptoms of labour, and requires your aid. In the morning she had risen from her bed in the most perfect health—the object of a thousand tender interests and ties by which she was bound to that whole society—and by how much closer bonds to her family!

There is perhaps not one of you who, by reverting to home, cannot single out, in imagination, some lady of the district, who may serve as the eidolon of my theme. Select one then, and accompany me in imagination while I show you what you have to do. You must go—you are the medical man, and you have announced yourself as such. Perhaps you may feel a little qualmish at the thought of what you are to meet. You cannot help but go. Well, you meet her husband at the door. How does he greet you? The other day I returned to my house in the evening. A gentleman was in my office; he had been waiting there for me. He came to call me to his daughter, and desired my presence and attention at the earliest moment. His manner to me was more solemn than if he had come to demand the payment of a thousand



pounds. When I reached the mansion, I sat for a few moments in the parlour, and the sound of carriage wheels, arrested at the door, was followed by the hurried ring of the bell. It was the young husband just arrived with the nurse. He came into the room and took my hand, which he wrung, while he turned away his head, but did not speak a word, nor could he conceal the tears which were springing from the deep fountains of his emotion, where were welling up such gushing affections as you may suppose of one who saw the jewel of his soul in some possible danger. Now that young gentleman never shook hands with me in his life before. But on this occasion he took it, and seemed to say, "Sir, I surrender into your hands, the most sacred trust: in doing so, I rely upon you as, next to my Maker, the being to whom I am compelled to appeal in this my extremity." I was not surprised at this. Gentlemen, had you seen that young lady, more blooming than the rose upon its stem—had you marked the patience with which she bore the unimaginable pangs of the travail—had you witnessed the outpourings of her full soul, as she presented to her father, and her husband, the grandchild and the son, which came to bind them still more closely in the holy community of sentiments, interests, affections, hopes!—you would no longer be surprised at the state of mind which exists under these circumstances. For how shall a man look, without fear, upon the approach of a conflict in which his *peace* may be slain! But let me go on with my story. You proceed to the residence of your patient. She receives you cheerfully, and puts herself under your protection. Yes, the labour is begun. It promises a favourable, and even a speedy issue. It will be over by six o'clock this afternoon. At six o'clock she is still in her agony. What an agony! Twelve o'clock, the progress is slow. The night is fleeing fast—but it is passed in groans, in a thousand vain efforts, vain expectations, vain hopes. She repeats a thousand times in plaintive tones "I can never bear all this, I shall surely die." Her friends look at you with inquiring eyes; even suspiciously, and they bend



down their faces to ask you, with whispers—Is all right? When will it end? What is your *real* opinion. Meanwhile the progress is slow—but it is progress; I believe. She becomes more restless—more distressed; streams of perspiration are running from her head and breast. The pains are short and feebler—they are separated by longer intervals. Feel her pulse. Good heavens! it beats 140 in the minute, and her wrist is now cold. The presenting part of her child is *perhaps* advancing—you hope—yes you hope, when you have no hope that the next pain may be a good one; it comes—but it is feebler than the last, and as it goes off you hear her voice—what does she say? I know not—she mutters something! Won't the next pain answer? No! She looks alarmed. Her features are utterly changed. She has lost her comeliness, and they have an unearthly expression. There is brooding over them that shadowy wing, whose rustle you seem almost to hear, preparing to soar upon its long, long flight. Her face is of a bluish cast. Her lips are swollen, and her eyes, which were as doves eyes in the morning, have a dull and unmeaning stare. What did she say again? Strange wanderings! incoherences! She is surely speaking to the phantoms of her far off friends. Compare her as she is with what she was when she saluted you gracefully and modestly in the morning, and invoked your science, your judgment, your skill. Where are they? Is there no agitation for us, in such a case!! What are the agitations of commerce, those of the bar, compared with these? Again—the child does not descend—it is evident that it is arrested in the pelvis—by the bony sides of which it is held, as in an iron vice—you cannot make it recede, and it will not advance. Her constitution meanwhile, worn out and exhausted with the vain efforts of the travail, is rapidly passing into the state technically denominated exhaustion, a little progress in which is a little progress towards—*death!*

That lady, from the far down depths of her misery and danger, calls upon you to rescue her, to save her! Here, too, is a whole great establishment, got up solely upon her



account; costly and magnificent,—the seat of many hopes and great happiness. If you let her die—What did I say? Yes! if you let her die, what is it all worth? Think of those bowed windows, that banner of mourning pendant at the door; the mirrors covered up from the light, as if men should shun the reflection of their own faces. And if you stop at the stair foot you will hear the sound of sobbing, and the convulsive heavings of a strong man's breast. Listen to my lectures. Look at me when I speak to you. Turn not your face away from my demonstrations, and I shall teach you how to overcome all this evil with good—yea, with much good. Take this blessed implement of art, which, like a revelation from heaven, comes so often to lead us by the hand out of places when, but for its merciful interposition, we should be beset with unconquerable difficulties. Take this,—use it aptly; use it just as it ought to be, and the victim is unbound, and the whole crumbling fabric of that household of peace, and joy, and great anticipations of long years of happiness, is reintegrated and restored, and by your masterly hand. If you are a fool, if you are an ignoramus, if you have neglected the opportunities you have enjoyed, you will either fail altogether of the needful skill, or this very instrument will become the means still more surely of showing you that beautiful woman, who was committed to your care but a few hours ago, in perfect health, and vigour, and glory, a ghastly corpse, with the pale face of its dead baby lying by its side. Now, how much does it cost a man before he can become nearly callous and indifferent to the prospect of such scenes as I have sketched for you? How long before he can learn to say, while all around is panic, and terror, and wild apprehension, with his calm soul unshaken by the moral whirlwind that rages around him?—Silence—be still—wait. Trust in *me*; and still on—and still on he ventures, until, seeing that the fit moment is come, he takes in his hand this beautiful instrument of pure mercy, and power, and safety, and beyond the reach of sense or sound, he adjusts it speedily, noiselessly, without the least pain or danger,

*offspring*





and by a few masterly movements of his hand—lo! that delicate creature, which, as Melancthon says, was *matricidæ moriturus*, beyond all hope, opens its glad and gladdening eyes to the light of the day. And then! who can pour out like her, like that new made mother, the rich effusions of a heart that rebounds from the borders of the grave, and sings and soars far, far up, up, and up to the very heaven of the holiest emotions, of gratitude to God for release from mortal pain, and for redemption from death itself. Look at that household! Is there a scene in the whole circle of the world where two human voices can be lifted up to say with greater unction, Behold, we have the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness!

There remains one trial more: it is when the surgeon fearfully casts his eye upon that child, in order to discover whether possibly some trace of the blade may have been left upon its form. It is a moment of intense anxiety, fully compensated by finding that it lives, and moves, and has its being, without spot or blemish, or the least impression of his daring operation. And the mother! it is well with her too.

Such, and frequent are the scenes through which you are destined to pass, young gentlemen! I do not pretend that I, or that any man can teach you how, always to bring to such fortunate issue the heavy charge of the happiness of families. Nor can society, nor will it, indeed, expect so much at your hands. But this it will expect. It will expect that you should know of no embarrassment in the discharge of your duty; that you should be able to say this is right, or that is wrong. What a great, and what an abiding consolation, for a man to be able clearly to discern what is duty to himself and others on such occasions: to enjoy a perfect confidence in the knowledge of his art! But, on the other hand, how must he feel, who knows he has forfeited not only the life that was, humanly speaking, put into his keeping, but in doing so, has lost with it his own self-respect.



I cannot but think, gentlemen, that I try your feelings upon this occasion. I cannot suppose that you are callous enough to look on such a picture as I have drawn, and which comes not near to the sober truth, for no tongue can tell it, (I appeal to the many physicians here to say if it is overdrawn,) without feeling in some degree, that if what I have represented be even like the truth, it will be necessary for you to do your duty, as far, at least, as it is connected with the particular department of instruction that is under my charge. I hope I have tried your feelings. I wish I could harrow them. I wish I could make you sensible in your heart of hearts, of the pangs I have endured on such occasions; pangs that might have been spared me, had I known in my early day what I have since been *obliged* to learn. Thank God! that lesson I have learned long ago. *modesty!*

The other day I had the happiness to hear an Introductory Lecture delivered in this College by my friend and colleague, the Professor of the Practice of Physic. In that lecture, which most of you, I suppose, heard, I was struck with the force of the claim made on us all by our brethren of the profession. Who, that listened to the encomiums pronounced upon many of the gentlemen belonging to our corps in various parts of the United States, could avoid indulging in some sentiments of a self-complacent kind, upon reflecting that he was in such honourable company, or shake off the conviction, that while he owes a debt to society and to the country, he also owes a deep one to the brotherhood to which he belongs. *Mitchell*

Ought he not so to take advantage of every opportunity that is presented to him, as to show himself worthy of belonging to such a goodly company?

Medicine is not a vile trade, that seeks only pecuniary compensation for the good it dispenses. Such were not the views of Kreemer. No! he went about *doing good!* that was *his* trade. *Sophomore*

Ought not a medical man to be a person noted and acknowledged for his probity? Ought he not to be every-



where acknowledged for his liberality? I see in him a minister of God, sent forth into the world to counteract much, and as far as is consistent with an ever over-ruling Providence, of the evils inseparable from the lot of man. He is, or ought to be, the depository of the most useful knowledge; for, after all, the most we can expect from the cultivation of the sciences and arts is the good they bring to the race of man; and what, I pray is more intimately conversant with the business and labours of man, than that knowledge which enables him either to preserve him in health, or to restore it when lost? The steam engine is a good invention. The axe, and the saw, and the plane, and the adze are good inventions; and the mariner's compass and the quadrant are good things for man. But what are all these to a *man*, in comparison with the life which I give him again; yes, give him with my own hand, when I save him from death by pleurisy or apoplexy, by fever, and a host of ills against which I guard him, by holding over him the *Ægis* of my art. It is a fact, that things which, in the general, excel in value for the wants and necessities of our race, sink into nothingness when compared with those which affect us in particular. Medicine, except medical jurisprudence and public hygiene, is a good for a *man*, and not for *men*. It is for individuals, and not for masses; it is like the air, or the food—indispensable.

11 Gentlemen, we present a singular spectacle to the world: we are a body of men who have been the restorers, the creators, and preservers of the sciences beyond whatever has been contributed to that end by lawyers, divines, merchants, and, indeed, all other professions who for the most part are concerned with specialities, which, however high, are but specialities still. The nature of our avocations compels us to be botanists, chemists, mineralogists. Among us are the profound geologist and natural historian. The biologist and metaphysician are ours. History, too, is within our sphere, since we are compelled to trace backwards the long record of men, in order to know what epidemic influences, from

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Thasos to Rome, and from Rome to London, have shed their blight upon the nations. We follow the pupil of Aristotle from the Granicus to the mouth of the Indus, and the battle of the Pyramids is for us a peculiar story, because we accompany Larrey there. Every herb that is endued with healing powers, we seek it out from its hidden *habitat*, and excruciate it in the alembic, or the retort, so that it may yield to our fellow men its sanative juices. The poor look to us for help, and the distressed pour into our ears the secret griefs that overwhelm them. We are present in the dwellings of all the people, and yet we seek not power nor authority. We do the good we were sent to do, and then we go somewhere else to repeat the same errand; in our sphere we are powerful, but out of it we are annihilated. Let us, then, know ourselves—what we are, and what we ought to be. Let us be in conduct and conversation pure and undefiled, so that every man of us, when he comes to make up his account at last, may be able to say that, as to his brethren, he has strengthened their bands by showing to the people what manner of man a good and upright physician is.

But I must hasten to a conclusion of this already long discourse. Let me say that in the United States the medical character is higher in the public estimation than any where else. It will become more highly estimated when the great body of our brethren shall devote a still larger proportion of their time to those ornaments of education which my respected colleague so emphatically recommended in his introductory lecture. The cheering prospects which the lecture held out by the great array of the good things already effected among us, ought to be the best encouragement to perseverance. Let us no longer think, the moment that we quit the grove or the Academy, that we are done with learning, but rather be conscious that we have just begun.

Gentlemen, I do not now, and never have believed, that the profession of a physician is designed to be one of the money-making pursuits of life. In fact there are not a great



many who become very rich by it. I don't think that he who engages in it with a single eye to the profits of his labour, adopts the true principle that should guide a man aiming at the attainment of the highest posts in the calling. Medicine as a calling is by its very nature beneficent—its constitution is charity, its aim to rescue the afflicted, to suspend or avert the stroke of death, to draw back into health and strength, and ease, the victim of sickness, debility, or pain. Called to a person labouring under hydrothorax, for instance, you have before you one of the extremest examples of human distress and misfortune. Every breath that he attempts to draw, every labouring pulse of his heart, every imploring and dubiously inquiring glance of his eye, are so many appeals to your sympathy. If there be any charity within you, its emotions will fill your heart, not with the *sacra auri fames*, the vile calculation of how much gold you will win by this misery, but with the sacred flame of love to your fellow man, whose pain fills you with sympathetic pain until you are drawn towards him with the strong desire to relieve and restore him; and your reward is great in the consciousness of the good you have done, or wished to do. But, inasmuch as you are to devote your lives to this charitable office, it is right that those whom you greatly serve should see to it that you do not suffer in your estate, because you are not a tradesman or an artisan, and they will see to it. The world who support liberally such a vast body of clergymen and gentlemen of the bar, and other persons not more closely allied to the producing classes than we are; that same world will willingly support us, when they find that we are worthy of their confidence, and they will reward us well. Those among us who are prudent in the management of our pecuniary interests, generally make out to live as well as the most fortunate classes of society, and some acquire early competency and even fortunes. Sir Astley Cooper lately died leaving behind him a vast fortune which the liberality of his countrymen showered upon him, in acknowledgement of his great services. Monsieur Velpeau, who but a



few years since, laboured at the anvil as apprentice to a blacksmith, has already attained to very easy circumstances, at the same time that he enjoys the reputation of being at the head of surgery in France, and has a renown that is heard throughout the world. The great Baron Dupuytren left a ministerial estate, and the greater Baron Larrey died poor. *Very much to the point!*

It is not to be presumed that either of these gentlemen was a *helluo honorariorum*, a fee-glutton. Their riches were the free offerings of those to whom they had rendered the services which such great men can render, and the poverty of one of them must have depended solely on his contempt of riches. How should he have loved wealth who feared not to tender to his companions in arms, on the distant shores of Palestine, the kindest services, notwithstanding the terror that surrounded them while perishing with plague, far from the vine clad hills which they had left in La Belle France.

Do you desire to make money? You can succeed in doing so in this calling. *base incitation*

Fear not; you have chosen a good part. It presents many motives to virtuous action, constant incentives to improvement of the mind and heart. It is far removed from the turmoil of politics, and the chances of commerce. In it there are few temptations to evil. The great thing is to let your minds and will be, to go forward—to keep your eyes steadily fixed upon certain high attainments in your art—and the public assuredly will appreciate you, when your time has come. Then your reward will equal any of your just expectations or desires.

I agree that what is called luck, or good fortune, does sometimes elevate very rapidly persons who, if weighed in the scales of justice, would be found wanting, in comparison with others whose merits, like a light put under a bushel, are not seen of men. But such individuals may be likened to a rocket, which goes up flashing and whizzing with a great sparkling and light, but in a very short season comes down a mere stick! Keep patience, therefore; toil on, and



*you & on & on*  
yet on. Your fellow citizens require solid ability from you, not empty pretension. And if you have it they will use it, and then your turn is come. There is ever encouragement in this country for probity, industry and ability, in the various callings of which society is composed. I say again, you have chosen a good part. There is much for you to be proud of in it. The day will soon arrive when the highest heads in the land may be brought low, and you, young gentlemen, the humblest of you, to stand over them to counsel for them, and to order for them; when Senators, and Governors, and Generals, and the most eminent Divines and Jurists, and the haughty belle, the cynosure of a thousand hearts and eyes, shall seek at your health-giving hands the power to move again in their orbits, from which they have been arrested and stricken down. Then you will feel your power; not power over the people to mislead and to defraud them; not power to bring you their votes. There will be no banners borne for you: no election lamps will be lighted, and brought by hundreds and by thousands to your door, while the multitudinous hurrah and the prolonged cheer greet your ears and those of your children. But there is better than all this. There is a conscience void of offence towards man, and haply towards God. There is a form that is met with reverence in the streets, and love in the highways. When you walk forth the eyes of the people will be turned upon you with favour and affection. If you become what you ought to be, and what you may be, you shall apply to yourselves the words of the patriarch in the day of his prosperity, before the great trials came which bowed him in the dust. "When I went out to the gate, through the city—when I prepared my seat in the street, the young men saw me and hid themselves, and the aged arose and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hands upon their mouth, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard me then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me it gave witness to me. Because, I de-



livered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me—my judgment was as a robe and a DIADEM.”



lived the poor last child, and the fatherless, and him that  
 had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready  
 to perish came by me, and I caused the widow's heart to  
 sing for joy. I was a father to the fatherless, and I clothed me—my  
 garments were of sackcloth."







